

NEWS

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Channel 4's women behave badly for New Vic's northern classic...

A New Vic production

A Taste of Honey

By Shelagh Delaney

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Fans of Channel 4 series' *Shameless* and *Phoenix Nights* are in for a sweet treat this month as the New Vic bring together a stellar combination of badly behaved broads for iconic northern play, *A Taste of Honey*.

Janice Connelly, best known for her role as Holy Mary in hit series *Phoenix Nights* is swapping religion for spirits as loose-woman-who-likes-a-drink, Helen in Shelagh Delaney's bittersweet play. Whilst *Shameless* wild child Maxine, AKA actress Joanne Higson, takes a break from filming to star in the North Staffordshire production as suffering daughter Jo.

The dysfunctional mother and daughter pairing will herald a memorable New Vic debut for the TV actors, who have fond associations with the much-loved, BAFTA award-winning film of the kitchen sink classic.

Says Janice: "I am thrilled to be playing the part of Helen. Like so many people I loved the film with Rita Tushingham and Dora Bryan. I have always been a big fan of Dora and was pleased, when I met her in Brighton, that at the age of 80 she could still do the splits!

"Originating as I do from Stockport it is a privilege and a dream come true to be involved in recreating this great northern classic."

Life changed for Connolly when Peter Kay spotted her as comedy character Barbara Nice in the final of Manchester's North West Act of the Year in 1998. Going on to make her name in a number of his shows, including *That Peter Kay Thing*, *Phoenix Nights* and *Max and Paddy's Road to Nowhere*, Janice also starred in *Phoenix* co-star Dave Spikey's acclaimed *Dead Man Weds*. The TV actress also had brief stint on the cobbles of Weatherfield during Kay's famous cameo in *Coronation Street* as his overbearing mother, Dolly Gartside.

Currently on our screens as feisty nurse Maxine Donnelly in Channel 4 ratings winner *Shameless*, Joanna Higson is a face to watch. Attracting the attentions of both Channel 4 and the BBC, she guest-starred in Jimmy McGovern's multi-award winning drama *The Street* after graduating from Salford University, and is a regular in northern-flavoured sketch show *Scallywagga* on BBC Three. Taking time out from her busy TV career for the New Vic production, Joanna will start work on series 7 of *Shameless* at the end of May.

The New Vic production sees Olivier award-nominated director and ex-New Vic Artistic Director Gwenda Hughes make a welcome return to the theatre, with a cast including Mark Chatterton from BBC BAFTA award-winning series *The Cops*, Darren Southworth from West End hit *Monty Python's Spamalot*, New Vic newcomer Duane Hannibal and acclaimed Musical Director, Howard Gray.

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Adds Janice, “It promises to be a wonderful theatrical experience to set this brilliant play with its live band in the round. I have always wanted to work with Gwenda Hughes and at the New Vic – it seems like all the planets are lining up for a cracking run!”

Tickets, which cost £8.50 – £17.50 (with concessions available), can be booked by calling the New Vic’s Box Office on 01782 717962 or online at www.newvictheatre.org.uk

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Both Janice and Joanna are available for interview. For further press information, including interview and image requests, please contact Clare Hargreaves on 01782 717954 ext 317 or at chargreaves@newvictheatre.org.uk

Editor’s Notes

A Taste of Honey

With her very first play, Shelagh Delaney wrote herself into the history of British theatre. A sensational success at Joan Littlewood's Stratford East in 1958, it moved into the West End, then Broadway. And the much-loved film version is a high point of British cinema. Not bad for an 18 year-old usherette from Salford!

Jo is a young girl with some grown-up problems. It’s hard enough living hand-to-mouth with her gadabout mother in a succession of dingy bedsits. And that’s before there was a new fancy man on the scene. Now she’s discovered that her boyfriend is about to sail off round the world - and there’s something she needs to tell him.

But, in this enchanting play, Jo’s never giving up on her dreams. With love, friendship and faith in the future, she’s determined to show that, no matter what, life can still be sweet.

At 17, Delaney started *A Taste of Honey* as a novel, but realised it would be better as a play after seeing a production of *Variations on a Theme* by Terence Rattigan, which she considered bland and trivial. Convinced that she could do better, and objecting to the fact that “North County people are shown as gormless, whereas in actual fact they are very alive and cynical”, she took a fortnight off work to adapt her novel into a play.

As a result, the young playwright helped to rejuvenate British theatre and address under-represented social issues of the age, with *A Taste of Honey* becoming an iconic work in the revolutionary ‘kitchen sink’ genre.